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The Elimination and Rational Reconstruction of the Supernatural Narrative in Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xiang Yuin Zizhi Tongjian

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Abstract. The Records of the Grand Historian retains abundant supernatural narratives. By contrast, the Zizhi Tongjian frequently modified such supernatural accounts when compiling source materials from earlier eras. The textual divergences between the two works embody shifts in historiographical outlooks and the concept of the Mandate of Heaven across the Han and Song dynasties. This article takes Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xiang Yu as the research object and adopts the text comparison method to compare the similarities and differences of relevant supernatural narratives recorded in the Annals of Xiang Yu between the two historical texts. Research has found that Sima Guang did not simply delete all the supernatural content, but used three methods of processing: direct deletion, rational rewriting, and retention of character language, in order to weaken the supernatural color of historical books. This type of text selection is the purpose and purpose of compiling the Zizhi Tongjian, and the selection of historical materials is based on the standard of learning from the country's governance; The ideological orientation of emphasizing human affairs and downplaying supernatural narrative in the history of the Northern Song Dynasty, as well as the combined effect of the chronological system. Through this case, it can be seen that the processing of historical texts by Song Dynasty historians is essentially a projection of their historical views and political concepts, providing concrete textual examples for understanding the evolution of the concept of destiny in the Han and Song dynasties.

Keywords: Records of the Grand Historian, Zizhi Tongjian, Annals of Xiang Yu, supernatural narratives, comparative study

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the distinct differences in Han and Song historiography: Han historical books often use narrative differences between supernatural narrative of destiny; The history books of the Song Dynasty have reduced some of the supernatural narrative content in historical materials, promoting the rationalization of historical narrative. The Records of the Grand Historian and the Zizhi Tongjian are benchmark works in the history of the Han and Song dynasties, respectively.

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They are the core reference texts for examining the transformation of historical narrative thinking and are also very meaningful for studying the transformation of historical narrative thinking.

In terms of research status, the academic community has achieved comparative research results between Records of the Grand Historian and Zizhi Tongjian: Shang Xiaoyu, Che Miaomiao, and Ma Haobin focus on specific characters and historical events, comparing the differences in writing between the two books and the concepts of historical material selection [1-3]. Guo Chuangren and Wang Keduan discuss narrative techniques, character image evolution, and changes in historical thinking [4, 5]. There are shortcomings and limitations: Most of them are macro level discussions or individual case analyses of characters, lacking case studies on the narrative of gods and monsters in the Annals of Xiang Yu; Only a simple comparison of the text, without sorting out the specific ways in which Sima Guang edited and modified the narrative; Undermining, editing, and revising the historical trends and political demands of the Song Dynasty. Based on this, this article focuses on the narrative of supernatural narrative related to the two books Annals of Xiang Yu, and explores three key issues: What are the textual differences in the supernatural narratives of the two books Annals of Xiang Yu? How Sima Guang Rationally Rewrite the Narrative of supernatural narrative? Text editing reflects the historical stance and contemporary demands of Han and Song historians?

This article takes Records of the Grand Historian and Zizhi Tongjian as the core original texts, and uses text comparison and narrative analysis methods to study some of the contents of The Annals of Xiang Yu in the two books. The purpose is to clarify the differences in Han and Song historiography. Sort out the context of historical studies shifting from the narrative of destiny to the recording of human affairs. Fill in the gaps in relevant case studies.

2. The main content of the supernatural narrative in the Annals of Xiang Yu

2.1. Definition of core concepts

The term 'supernatural narrative' in this article refers to the narrative text written by Sima Qian in the Annals of Xiang Yu, which deviates from the logic of human affairs and relies on heavenly signs, prophecies, and supernatural phenomena. It differs significantly from the objective environment, character behavior, language, and other recorded historical materials. In the Annals of Xiang Yu in the Records of the Grand Historian, it can be divided into three categories: prophecies, attribution of heavenly mandate, and narrative of dynastic mandate and anomalous portents.

And rational reconstruction refers to the selective deletion and modification of the content of Annals of Xiang Yu by Sima Guang when writing Zizhi Tongjian: On the one hand, directly delete texts related to supernatural narrative; On the one hand, it rationalizes and rewrites, dissolving the anomalies of destiny; On the other hand, it is to fully preserve the words of the characters.

2.2. Sorting out the narrative of supernatural narrative in records of the grand historian: annals of Xiang Yu

Firstly, the first type is the narrative of prophecies. Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xiang Yu records: Ever since King Huai of Chu went to Qin and never returned, the people of Chu have pitied him down to the present. Hence Nangong of Chu said: "Though Chu may be reduced to but three clans, it shall be Chu that destroys Qin." "Though Chu may be reduced to but three clans, it shall be Chu that destroys Qin."This sentence comes from the recluse Nan Gong in the Chu region, who prophesied the fate of the downfall of Qin and the rise of Chu. Its narrative logic is not based on specific historical causal analysis, but belongs to the narrative of prophecy. And Fan Zeng used

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this sentence to persuade Xiang Liang to support the descendants of the King of Chu, to use the legitimacy of the Chu state to win over the hearts of the people, and to give legitimacy to Xiang Yu's rebellion against Qin.

Secondly, the second type is the attribution narrative of destiny. This narrative is reflected in two parts: Xiang Yu's breakout at Gaixia and his refusal to cross the Wujiang River. When Xiangyu broke through the encirclement at Cuan Xia, he sighed, "This is Heaven destroying me; it is no fault of my fighting skill." When the head of Wujiang Pavilion advised Xiangyu to cross the river to reorganize his foundation, Xiangyu said bluntly, "If Heaven is destroying me, why should I cross the river?" Xiangyu attributed all the military and political failures to destiny, rather than reflecting on his own stubbornness and other mistakes. Sima Qian retained the sentence "Heaven destroying me" and gave Xiang Yu a fatalistic color, which belongs to the typical fate attribution narrative.

Finally, the third category is the narrative of dynastic mandate and anomalous portents. As Sima Qian the Grand Historian remarks in the text: "I heard from Master Zhou that 'Shun presumably had double pupils in his eyes.' I have also heard that Xiang Yu likewise had double pupils."Sima Qian linked Xiang Yu with Shun, one of the three emperors and five emperors, and gave him a special symbol of luck and destiny; Fan Zeng remonstrated with Xiang Yu: "When Lord Pei was east of the Xiao Han Mountains, he craved wealth and goods and was fond of beautiful women. Now that he has entered the pass, he has taken none of the treasures, and no women have been favoured by him. This shows his ambitions are far from trivial. I have had men observe his vital aura: it takes the form of dragons and tigers, displaying five colours — this is the aura of a Son of Heaven. Strike him quickly; do not let this opportunity slip." This represents Fan Zeng's observation of Liu Bang. Believing that Liu Bang possessed "the aura of a Son of Heaven", he urged Xiang Yu to "strike him quickly; do not let this opportunity slip", foreshadowing Liu Bang's ultimate victory in the subsequent Chu Han Contention. As Liu Bang made his escape, "Then a violent wind sprang up from the northwest, snapping trees, tearing roofs apart, whirling sand and stones. Dark gloom fell over the day, bearing down on the Chu army. The Chu troops fell into utter confusion and scattered, and only dozens of riders escaped with King Han." The abnormal wind disturbed the Chu army, helped Liu Bang out of danger, and protected Liu Bang with celestial phenomena.

To sum up, in the Annals of Xiang Yu in the Records of the Grand Historian, it can be divided into three categories: prophecies, attribution of heavenly mandate, and narrative of dynastic mandate and anomalous portents. Prophecies employ folk sayings to foretell dynastic transitions. The attribution of heavenly mandate attributes gains and losses to destiny via characters' reflections, highlighting their tragic fatality. The narrative of dynastic mandate and anomalous portents utilizes supernatural elements including physical marks, aura divination and strange celestial events to symbolize the Mandate of Heaven behind the Chu Han wars. Sima Qian integrated these three kinds of narratives into the historical records, which was not only influenced by the time of the thought of "heaven and man induction" in the Han Dynasty, but also enriched the literary color of the characters and stories, leaving the original historical materials with supernatural color for later historians.

3. The elimination and rational reconstruction of the annals of Xiang Yu in Zizhi Tongjian

For narratives that lack historical evidence and are pure supernatural narrative, Sima Guang directly deleted relevant content, with the most typical representative being records with heavy pupils. As recorded in Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xiang Yu, Sima Qian remarks: "I heard from Master Zhou that 'Shun presumably had double pupils in his eyes.' I also heard that Xiang Yu likewise had double pupils" [6]. Sima Qian linked Xiang Yu and Shun with the help of the special appearance of heavy pupil, and endowed Xiang Yu with the attribute of innate destiny. And the

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relevant paragraphs in the Zizhi Tongjian were completely deleted by Sima Guang. In Sima Guang's historical standards, supernatural narratives such as "otherworldly" cannot reflect the actual gains and losses of governing the country and military affairs, so they are directly deleted.

For narratives with true historical facts but attached with the color of celestial anomalies, Sima Guang adopted a rewriting method of changing the text and weakening the divine meaning, with the most typical representative being the record of Liu Bang's escape from the strong wind celestial phenomenon. As recorded in Records of the Grand Historian: "Then a violent wind sprang up from the northwest, snapping trees, tearing roofs apart, whirling sand and stones. Dark gloom fell over the day, bearing down on the Chu army. The Chu troops fell into utter confusion and scattered, and only dozens of riders escaped with King Han." The conjunction then (Chinese: 于是) frames the gale as a supernatural portent signifying Heaven's protection of Liu Bang. By contrast, in Zizhi Tongjian, Sima Guang wrote: "It happened that a violent wind rose from the northwest, snapping trees, tearing roofs apart, whirling sand and stones. Dark gloom fell over the day, bearing down on the Chu army. The Chu troops fell into confusion and scattered, and only dozens of riders escaped with King Han" [7]. He replaced the conjunction then with it happened that (Chinese: 会). Meaning "by chance" or "as luck would have it", this term merely registers a coincidental meteorological event and erases the supernatural implication behind the gale. Sima Guang did not delete the historical events themselves, but only modified individual words to rewrite the visions with the color of destiny into objective and accidental natural phenomena, which is a typical "rational reconstruction".

For the dialogues recorded in historical books, Sima Guang kept the original text intact without making any deletions or modifications. First are Xiang Yu's monologues. In Records of the Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xiang Yu, during his breakout at Gaixia, Xiang Yu declares: "This is Heaven destroying me; it is no fault of my fighting skill." When he refuses to cross the Wu jiang River, he states: "If Heaven is destroying me, why should I cross the river?" Sima Guang preserves these two utterances completely, without any textual alteration, in Zizhi Tongjian. Sima Guang kept this passage not to acknowledge the existence of destiny, but to highlight Xiang Yu's stubborn and self willed personality. The second is the admonition from Fan Zeng at the Hongmen Banquet: "When Lord Pei was east of the Xiao Han Mountains, he craved wealth and goods and was fond of beautiful women. Now that he has entered the pass, he has taken none of the treasures, and no women have been favoured by him. This shows his ambitions are far from trivial. I have had men observe his vital aura: it takes the form of dragons and tigers, displaying five colours — this is the aura of a Son of Heaven. Strike him quickly; do not let this opportunity slip." Fan Zeng used the reason of "the aura of a Son of Heaven" to persuade Xiang Yu, which was a key discourse that propelled the course of history. Therefore, Sima Guang retained the "historical discourse" that truly existed in political games, was quoted by historical figures, and influenced decision-making. The third is a folk prophecy in Chu:"Ever since King Huai of Chu went to Qin and never returned, the people of Chu have pitied him down to the present. Hence Nangong of Chu said: 'Though Chu may be reduced to but three clans, it shall be Chu that destroys Qin.'This is a common saying passed down among the people of Chu, which records the anti Qin sentiment of the Chu people. The Zizhi Tongjian fully preserves the original sentence. Sima Guang retained this sentence because the words spoken by the characters, even if they have a prophetic tone, are true political discourse in historical contexts and belong to "historical facts".

In summary, Sima Guang's text transformation logic is as follows: firstly, delete the supernatural narratives that do not help reflect the rise and fall of human affairs; Secondly, revise the wording of real events with attached heavenly mandate anomalies to weaken their supernatural connotations; Thirdly, preserve the native dialogue of the characters and distinguish between their speech and the

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judgments of historians. Filter and adjust the supernatural and supernatural narratives in Records of the Grand Historian, reconstructing the narrative logic of the Chu Han rivalry from emphasizing "heavenly mandate dominance" to focusing on "personnel decision-making".

4. The deep historical reasons for the deletion and modification of the supernatural narrative in Records of the Grand Historianin Zizhi Tongjian

4.1. Writing purpose

Sima Qian did not initiate the narration of supernatural narrative destiny in Records of the Grand Historian, but the writing tradition of pre Qin historiography. Zuo Zhuan and Guo Yu in the spring and Autumn Period collected and recorded many folk prophecies, taking destiny as an important clue of historical narrative [8, 9]. Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historianinherits the narrative paradigm of previous historical books, incorporating celestial phenomena, anomalies, prophecies, and other contents into biographical writing. For Sima Qian, recording the strangeness of gods seemed to be a necessary means to follow the tradition of recording ancient history and fully restore the folk historical memory of Chu and Han.

The title of the book Zizhi Tongjian was determined by Emperor Shenzong of Song Dynasty. The word "Zizhi" means helpful in governing the country, "tong" indicates that the content of this book covers ancient and modern times, and "jian"means to draw inspiration from it [5]. Therefore, the core purpose of Sima Guang's compilation of the Zizhi Tongjian is to "reflect on the rise and fall of past lives and examine the gains and losses of the present". The fundamental goal of the entire book is to provide historical lessons and experiences for governing the country. Any supernatural narratives that are not helpful in summarizing the gains and losses of chaos control are often deleted. Sima Guang clearly established the criteria for selecting historical materials in his letter "Answering the Dream of Fan", which guided the work of compiling history: "If the strangeness is limited to the bizarre, and the humor is limited to the mocking, then please delete it directly." Its talismans and auspicious symbols are useless and can be deleted [10]. Its meaning is that for purely absurd and bizarre stories that are only for ridicule, as well as auspicious signs that lack political warning value, they can be directly deleted. But this does not mean that Sima Guang wants to erase all texts related to supernatural narrative.

As recorded in the Annals of Xiang Yu, the vision of Xiang Yu's double pupils was only a deification of the character and could not provide the monarch with governance experience, so it was directly deleted. The reason why the prophecies of Duke Nan of Chu were preserved is that they can reflect public opinion and provide rulers with reference. In Sima Guang's view, the divine mandate cannot explain the rise and fall of dynasties, and what is truly worth considering for future monarchs is personnel gains and losses. This determines his criteria for choosing between the narrative of supernatural narrative.

4.2. Ideological background

During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, in order to strengthen the monarch's power, Dong Zhongshu proposed the theories of "correspondence between heaven and man "and" unity of heaven and man", which became the official mainstream ideology. Its theory holds that the heavens and humans are of the same kind, mutually sensing each other. The heavens can intervene in human affairs, and humans can also sense the heavens. This theory binds heaven and human affairs, believing that celestial phenomena, anomalies, and prophecies are all the will transmitted by heaven,

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and the succession of dynasties and the success or failure of characters are predetermined by fate. This set of ideas profoundly influenced the social cognition of the Han Dynasty. In this ideological environment, the people of the Han Dynasty interpreted historical changes based on fate, disasters, and fortunes. Sima Qian could not break away from the ideological framework of his time, and wrote the narratives of supernatural narrative, such as "heavy pupils and different faces", which echoed the popular understanding of destiny in the Han Dynasty with supernatural records, and fitted with the public's way of thinking in interpreting history at that time.

In the middle and late Northern Song Dynasty, the ideological trend of valuing personnel and historical facts rose in Confucianism. Although it did not completely deny the concept of "heaven", it advocated that historical judgment should emphasize people's subjective actions, opposed over exaggerating the fate of supernatural narrative, and did not advocate using supernatural events to explain the success or failure of the dynasty. At the same time, Neo Confucianism began to sprout, which also reflected this idea trend.

Under the influence of this thought, Sima Guang dealt with the narrative of Xiang Yu's defeat: he kept the original words of "Heaven's death to me" in Xiang Yu's mouth, and only objectively recorded it as the loser's self feelings, which did not mean that he recognized and confirmed the destiny of heaven. In Sima Guang's narrative logic, Xiangyu's downfall was attributed to the gains and losses of personnel, reflecting the value orientation of the Song Dynasty's idea of valuing personnel over supernatural things.

4.3. Style difference

The Records of the Grand Historian is a biographical historical book that combines the dual characteristics of historiography and literature, emphasizing the depiction of characters and moral evaluation, making historical narratives both artistically charming and deeply imbued with ideological connotations [4]. If only historical events are narrated in a plain manner, the character images of Xiang Yu and Liu Bang will lack three-dimensional richness; The use of divine and supernatural narrative methods such as attribution of fate and anomalies of qi aims to create a strong conflict of destiny: Xiangyu was defeated by the emperor double pupils but committed suicide, Liu Bang did not come from a prominent background, but he gained the fortune of the emperor, the strong contrast of destiny amplifies the tragic color of Xiang Yu, endow the story of Chu Han rivalry with strong literary appeal. Sima Qian uses supernatural narratives to highlight the fate of characters and highlight his unique writing techniques.

Zizhi Tongjian is a chronicle history book, which is dominated by historical facts and pays attention to revealing the laws of history, making the work have high academic value and practicability. Weakening the lyrical elements of literature and paying more attention to the political enlightenment of events. Therefore, it will peel off the supernatural description in the text and complete the rational reconstruction of the supernatural narrative in Records of the Grand Historian.

To sum up, Sima Guang's choice of supernatural texts is the result of the joint effect of multiple factors, such as the purpose of compilation, the trend of Confucianism of the times, and the chronological style.

5. Conclusion

Through the comparative study of the corresponding texts of Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Xiang Yu and Zizhi Tongjian. This paper finds that Sima Guang's ways of dealing with the narrative of supernatural narrative are complete deletion, rational rewriting, and retaining the

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character's discourse. This text change is the result of Sima Guang's compilation purpose of serving the country and warning, the trend of seeking truth in historiography in the Song Dynasty, the thought of valuing personnel and ignoring destiny, and the style of chronicle history books.

Through the case of Annals of Xiang Yu, this study shows the change of the concept of destiny in historiography from the Western Han Dynasty to the Northern Song Dynasty. This case can help understand how the historians of the Song Dynasty rationalized the historical materials of the biography of the century, and also reveal that behind the choice of the text of historical books, it is not only the revision of the text, but also the projection of historians' historical view and political idea.

This study only takes Annals of Xiang Yu as the research object, the scope of investigation is relatively limited, and there is no discussion on the deletion and modification of God and monster narrative in Zizhi Tongjian in the complete book of Records of the Grand Historian. In addition, this paper focuses on the text comparison of the two historical books, and less on the horizontal comparison with the works of historians in the same period of the Northern Song Dynasty. Subsequent research can broaden the sources of text and systematically sort out the selection of supernatural narrative historical materials in the Zizhi Tongjian for the entire Records of the Grand Historian, in order to further explore the overall attitude of Song Dynasty historiography towards the concept of heavenly mandate and anomalies.

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